ACHARYA BHABANANDA



a rebel speaks

LIPIPUSPA NAYAK

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Acharya Bhabananda

Selected, Transcreated with an introduction
by
Lipipuspa Nayak

INSIGHT
In collaboration with
MAYUR PUBLICATIONS

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[If 'Seeking Truth' in my own way, either empirically or Philosophically, I need to protest in words that seem rebellious, then, Yes, I am a ***rebel***".

- Acharya Bhabananda



It is a strange land :
void, enormous void,
like the frustrated midday of my life;
shadows in the sky drift
sure and preordained
like sun and moon;
time has shrunk to a moment.

J P Das]

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INTRODUCTION

Translation is a fairly ancient activity. *Rig Veda* was hymns written in pre-Panini Sanskrit and the spoken language. The theory of Aryan invasion, based on linguistic evidence put forth by European Indologists from 17th century, is being challenged today. The *Veda*s, by all accounts, were passed on orally down the generations, without a written version for quite some time, at the time Sanskrit language and script was developing. This also probably means that the text was being translated over at least a thousand years, from Circa 5000 BC.

It is an entirely different story, however, that the current scenario of translation theories and practices owes its genesis and is sustained, largely, by the realities surrounding Bible translating. Bible translating began in the 3rd century BC and involved 1393 languages by 1968. It was and still continues to be the testing-ground of translators almost from its written beginnings, and provides clues for rendering works of art.

The translation of the Bible started with interlinear glosses, the primitive and least

valuable of all methods of translation. Glosses led to the notion of word-equivalence, and hence to the concordant method of translation whereby stylistic modification of words to suit the context was inhibited. At the other extreme came the free paraphrases, chiefly of the Old Testament, with the risk of individual interpretation of the original words. The best Translator adopted a middle course, by communicating the truth of the Biblical message in the idiom of his language, and bringing in new words as per the requirement of the context. The modern preference for 'philological' translation, as opposed to 'inspirational' has been very much pronounced. Thus each new version of the Bible becomes more communicative, with the omission of technical terms, dialect and slang, directed at increasing number of less-well-read peoples. The logic being, the target language reader can only accept the geographical and historical remoteness of the cultural background being presented to him, if that behaviour and experience is recast in his own culture.

The phenomenon has also helped translation among languages within a country, albeit without respect for the grammar and syntax of the target language. In India, for example, the inevitability of translation in the context of contact of languages and cultures within the region has been largely governed by Indo-English bilingualism. This dates back to the arrival of the Europeans in India, when translation and interpretation from and into Portuguese, Spanish and French, but primarily English played an important role in at least three areas: trade; work of Christian missions; and colonization. Translation of literature for comparative studies, which is a recent and marginal feature, has evolved over these efforts through time.

An Indian translator also finds himself in the peculiar situation where he has to work exclusively in English, and not his own language because of the dominance of the former. This situation repeats in other Commonwealth countries too. This is in contrast with the western world, where a translator is normally required to translate into his mother tongue [acting upon the hypothesis that one's control of the mother tongue is the best]. This is a built-in linguistic alienation of the translator and poses an obvious challenge to translation. Today, most translations between Indian languages are, through English renderings, and to a smaller extent, Hindi. There is a need for training translators. There is too much study on theories of translation in Indian universities. This is unnecessary. The training courses must address first to having enough translators who know at least two Indian languages. Translators require education in two languages consisting of basic language teaching at Secondary level (covering for example names of flora and fauna). And this is far more important than research on translation theories.

While these warring issues in the field of translation (commonwealth and third world countries vs. the western countries) are like to interest the scholars of Translation Studies, the practicing translators will surely have their own no-nonsense considerations. I, for one, have steered clear of most of the trodden risks in the field. Because as far as this project is concerned, I had the fortuitous chance to work within my mother tongue and shared with the author, Acharya Bhabananda (AB) my agony of a Post-Colonial Indian. Probably AB has assigned himself the role of the quintessential Seer-Indian; was prophetic of shapes of things to come during his temporal transition from pre-independent India to the Post-Colonial global humankind and tried to both resist and survive the pangs through his writings. Separated by a generation, I

relate to his writings, which carry eternal human predicaments, through changing times and civilisational partitioning of the world.

In addition, on this humble little translations project lies the shadow of AB's erstwhile friend and my father, Radha Binod Nayak - a writer with nine collections of short stories, plays and critical pieces. I had heard Radha Binod Nayak refer to AB, his writer-friend, as a non-comformist, avant garde writer who had migrated to the US to seek knowledge. The story of his return to India was also a topic of interest to the Writers in Orissa, the east-coastal Indian state. Though, I had never expected that I would translate his works. I agreed to a request from AB to do the job remembering our occasional little dinner-table talks that I had left behind years and years ago.

Nostalgia apart, AB commands a curious space in the literary lore of Orissa, and deserves the sense of greatness a translator experiences while translating him. His writings share to a great extent the literariness of the works by another illustrious writer of Oriya prose Gobinda Tripathy (1899-62). Though a lifetime separates the two, a few features are unavoidable in their writings. For one, both have their respective singular linguistic sub-worlds. They deliberately wrote (AB is still writing) in a colloquial idiom, but the subject canvas certainly was never weighed down by the limitations of this idiom. Distant and somber themes found their entry into this *deshi* idiom: English literature; Indian and western literary practices, functioning of Government machineries, war, the League of Nations, life in the US, ego-centrism, the complexity of human identity with its virtues and vices, the politics of awards and accolades and so on. This point about a language system not behaving conventionally in a text entails a Post-Structuralist presumption. This cannot quite be said of the writings by many

writers, contemporary to these two, whose thematic environ was always bound and regulated by the nuances of the linguistic codes they used. This calls for craftsmanship, boldness, a truly universal enterprise and the artist at the same time has answered his social obligation.

There is a tone of insurrection in most of the writings by AB. At times it is self-ridicule of the narrator that morphs into die-hard optimism. At other times it is anger and the anger of the artist is wrapped up in humor, and there is remarkable tolerance for lesser humans. Humor and laughter, as creative techniques, are particularly Indian.

Let me explain this point a little further. There is a tradition of Sanskrit tales about women, and often to their disadvantage. Harlots in Sanskrit fiction are sometimes depicted as comical. In *Latakamelaka* (Kaviraj Shankaradhara, tr. Kapiladevgiri Sahityacharya, Vidyabhavan, 1967) Dantura [Madam Toothey], an old prostitute, calls in a doctor because her best girl Madanmanjari [Miss Lovebouquet] has a fishbone caught in her throat. The physician, the consummate quack Jantuketa [Dr. Wormbanner] explains that his father was once confronted with such a case. A camel in the desert got a crab caught in its throat somehow. To treat the camel thick ropes were tied around the camel's muzzle and tugged on hard — suddenly the crab was dislodged from the camel's throat.

When Dr. Jantuketu suggests the same treatment for Madanmanjari, she begins to laugh at the doctor, to laugh so convulsively that the fishbone is dislodged from her throat. This is a satire against the doctor, but attitude towards the young harlot is, as typical in Sanskrit prose and drama, one of humorous indulgence. The storytellers would appear to be saying that the misconduct of a professional like a doctor has

to be ridiculed, so that he reforms himself. Satire is definitely reformist. But a prostitute cannot possibly be taught chastity.

AB does adhere to this classical Indian aesthetic ideology. What else explains his pieces like *A Night at Bloomington Hospital ?*

On the selection of the pieces for the anthology-I wanted to have the articles with lesser lengths. AB's worlds and words are complex to decipher. Dinanath Pathy, the inscrutable, internationally acclaimed painter from Orissa has chipped in to add to the cover design and Aswini Kumar to the understanding of the pieces through his line-illustrations. They deserve my unswerving gratitude for their effort.

LIPIPUSPA NAYAK



WHY DO I WRITE?

My writer's life cannot be said to be long. It is not significant in terms of volume. And as for merit and value, only the readers can say if my works belong to a certain genre. But I have never evinced an interest to advertise myself as a writer or man of letters. I have joined several literary institutions; this is because of my conviction that organization of institutions is a necessity. This could also be due to a sense of obligation. Over time this affinity with literary institutions has grown personal. My relationship with literary organizations has grown to intimacy at times; at other time it has skipped the surface. These sundry experiences have taught me not to nurture the assurance that I am a writer. I lack the interest to crave for the recognition I should get as a writer or as a litterateur. Therefore, 'Why I write?' – this question is irrelevant

for me. Because I *do not* write. No ideology, literary technique, ritual or custom or civilizational practices hold any appeal for me – I *do not* write, period.

A person's character builds on his review of his own life; its constituent elements and the way he has confronted the battles of these elements. To make an evaluation of this persona is a very difficult affair. So to understand the personality of a writer, or, to analyze the inspirational ideals and events lurking behind his personality – so that even irrelevant issues about him may too appear relevant – is the same as asking a writer this question: 'Why do you write?' When I do not write, how can I answer the question: 'Why do I write?' Of course, one might take up a few articles from the bulk of my printed write-ups and upon discussing these writings, comment that 'I write to advertise for myself'. Or someone else might say that I want to show off and hence write. Another person may comment: 'I write for an award, or bouquets and accolades'. But these are views of those who have considered me to be a writer.

I have tried over and over again, and have failed. Can I ever draft a satisfactory answer to this question – 'Why do I write?'

I do not write – so I am not a writer. Since I have reached this conclusion, I face no problems now. Yes, I owe authorship to a few printed articles; or at least there are

some writings that have been acknowledged to be my creation – or are published under my authorship. Have I been expressed in these writings enough, in myriad silhouettes, forms, modes, and outlines? Well, I have lacked the perseverance to examine this possibility, and the emotional zeal to lend this possibility an intellectual linguistic orientation. During this long (I feel it has been very long) life span, amid my innumerable wonderful experiences and realizations, I have been, for whatever reasons, attracted towards incidents, individuals, or even animals. And their life, work, consciousness, ideology has created ripples in my psychic realm. I have only tried to hold together these ripples in a tree-trunk of language. For this I have fallen back on many idioms, depending on the theme or the extant situational compulsions. I have often dwelled on the specificity of idioms for expression of a certain emotion, which instantly marvels my contemplation irrespective of time and manner, and in an attempt to use an idiom for expressing a lightened version of such an emotion a few creative pieces have come out. These are expressions-with-forms of the strains of feelings that are without a form, and if these are taken as writings, then I have probably written something. But I am not willing to accept this discourse. Because the diverse "I's" expressed through the articles represent an assortment of 'I-ism'. They do not stand for the ideology of one definite 'I', or for that matter of Bhabagrahi Mishra – a certain unsocial animal.

I have not learnt to be disheartened with either scandal or eulogy. Though, disheartenment has injured and wounded

my life over and over again. To understand human character; to make an assessment of the social environment may have contributed, among other factors, to my sense of despair. I have not reached a definite conclusion on this. At times I had the premonition that my death may also come accidentally, like my birth. And hence there is no definite logic whatsoever why one must delve deep into this imprecise world of sentiment, accept it as one's own and lock the realizations in a cluster of alphabets. Perhaps I have been trying, without a reason, to imprison this world of sentiment through language and this endeavor of mine cannot entitle me to the status of a writer. Therefore I am not a writer; I am no more than a publisher. And like most publishers I am obliged to be sensitive to feelings and merely express these feelings.



I WILL NOT REST

I will not rest; THE moment of rest has not come. So I will not take rest. How can one who loves struggle in life and whose element is structured such can he ever think of rest?

Then why do you all want me to rest? There was a time when the body or the *pitcher* used to take flight and you could rest automatically. Nowadays, the *pitcher* does not fly away; it only fills up – in many ways, with myriad pain and laughter and sundry pathos. The *pitcher* is yet to fill up to the brim, though it partakes of the water of many a bank.

When this form or the pitcher breaks, it will be sculpted again on the potter's wheel; many a new pitcher are being molded. Heaps of pitchers, of myriad brands – with what hues have you, Mother Goddess, embellished this creation of yours!

In some days my pitcher will fill up, and will run out its utility. A new pitcher will be required. I will be transferred to that pitcher. I will not need any traveling allowance for my transfer; no signature of the authority – the minister or the secretary in charge – will be called for, no letter of recommendation from Her Highness. No certification of my age will be required, my star signs will not be ascertained.

Yes, pallbearers will be required. Each will try to solace the other in many ways. My kith and kin, my loving fellow countrymen will be consoled with scores of alibis. Perhaps some will make a last moment effort to stake claim of my dead body. Dogs and vultures will gang up to devour that corpse.

Those who once blessed my wife swearing on her bangles and the vermilion mark on her forehead – that her married woman's bangles should remain strong forever and her forehead should glow with the vermilion mark asserting that her husband is alive – they will be looking on now. My wife's golden bracelets will strike their eyes: 'O where will these golden bracelets head? What price will it fetch? Who will stake claim to this jewelry? Or who all will share the money?'

But I will not rest, no way. Not now and never – there is no end to my journey; I will travel from one pitcher to another and read out to you my manifesto of life.

I do not eschew labor; I have infinite strength within for my *dharma*. I will not take rest, I will never rest. If ever I slow down while walking, for a while or two, that will be because I wanted to give a twist to my agenda of life. Then another new resolve of another new journey will ensue – expanding the pledge of a new journey with new ideas.

So here I am, walking, I will be continuing with my journey with that flaming pledge. This pledge is not for my sake, or the sake of my kith and kin. Tens of millions of men and women cover my vision, and tens of millions of men and women who will take birth tomorrow. It is for them and for them only that my journey does not have an end, it must not come to an end.

I am a mendicant, roaming through countries. I will be fleeing from one planet to another spanning eons. I will not take rest… I have never asked for rest.

(October, 1977)



["I believe a creative writer
has the freedom to be
sub-versive at times,
of the established values,
beliefs and practices in a
traditional/transitional society.
A writer needs this
freedom within decent
and dignified limits
of words, symbols and
rhetorics used.

- Acharya Bhabananda



I lost my way
in helpless return,
I sit and wonder
about fate's injustice;
looking at the lines on my palms
I measure the distance
between one despair
and another.

- J P Das]

THE POET

Everyone is a poet. More or less. One may be worth a penny; another a rupee. Many write poems, quite a few read them; but perhaps the critics outdo these two categories. It is not clear if the critics of poetry form the majority among men of literature across countries. But in the case of my country, the situation is a unique one. The climate is different out here. Here each house has its own physician, of both the allopathic and Ayurveda streams. They will offer you medication no matter if you ask for their advice or not, and no matter if they really know your pulse from your vein or for that matter if 'disease' begins with a 'd' or an 's'. Here everyone talks big. Well, one would have been saved if the matter had ended there, but no, everyone here prides himself on the fact that they can brag. Oblivious of their lack of knowledge on issues, they want to show off: 'We have

understood the subject and will make you understand it the way no one can.' They will even resort to lines from popular Oriya poems to qualify their arguments.

This is not the issue of their competence; this rather points to their incompetence – the symptoms of one suffering from hepatitis – the yellow-eye-disease. They boast to cover up their fault, to obscure the weaknesses they wear on their sleeves. They swell with conceit till they spill over and crash to the ground. That is the net outcome of the whole issue. But after they crash to the ground, they crow: 'Well, that was a physical exercise.'

Now, amid situations like this, should I introduce a poet at all? I will then be, to quote an Oriya adage, chomping carrots before someone who is hard of hearing.

The poet is a useless creature of this age. An outcaste and off-flavor. He shuns physical labour, courts luxury and has queer manners. Absurdity is his fancy; he is a redundant performer on the stage of the world. Yet he lives on. His survival is not for nothing; his existence is not without essence. His efforts have not gone futile. He has been creative. Ceaselessly. Eternity is his goal. Harmony is his ideal. Infinity is his stretch. Opinions vary. So at times he becomes his antithesis. As they say, a goat turns a dog through words of three mouths. A poet who relished the seat of the king of kings yesterday is a wandering beggar

today. The music of the word of mouth travels at the speed of two thousand miles. This music plugs up the ears, enthralls the mind. This music dwarfs man; makes him fragile and dejected. Just when the human ear is bunged, the poet pours down into it the charms – *mruta sanjeebani*, the elixir of life for the dead, so that new life is instilled into the dead. The cosmic soil rejuvenates with the downpour from the early monsoon. You may recognize the poet or overlook him; you may listen to him or ignore his words; he sings on and will continue to do that always. Because he is the creator and in his creation does he rejoice. All of you there, or we all around everywhere, have seen the creation; we have failed to see the creator. We epitomise Hiranyakashipu – the 'Hindu' evil of the Puranic times who valued wealth and human prowess. We lack the heart of Prahalad, the devotee who saw god in a palace column, in our search for the creator. How will we ask for bliss in life?

We cannot even recognize the poet, let alone retain him with us, howsoever hard we bang our head against books, or leaf through dictionaries, or recite aloud from memory the records of history. For to keep hold of the poet, we need to nurture a mind; not the power of wealth or muscle. And the mind should match only to that of Neelakantha – lord Shiva who drank up the poison potion that arose from the churning of the oceans by Vishnu. If we gulp down the poison around us in one sip as well as the waters of the

seven seas, we might perhaps have an acquaintance of the poet. But where do we have that kind of acumen? The seven seas surround us all right, from within and outside, but they contain sludge that will measure, not seven but seven thousand human beings in height. Deep inside the seawaters lays a golden case holding in its fold a pitch-dark bumblebee. Remember the bumblebee of the children's stories where the insect in real is the secret to the life of the old witch who has locked up the princess, and to rescue the princess, the prince must reach the golden case beneath the waters and the sludge and kill the bumblebee? Now, in this case do you know the name of the witch? No, you wouldn't because this name does not figure in Granny's tales; even if it does, why should you remember that? Well, now, you can know the name of the witch – her name is 'vanity'. Now you are the prince and you possess the secret to the witch's death.

But you are only swimming on the surface of the waters, cutting across the waves, and assure yourself that you have the entire sea in within your fist. You have to sink deep; drink a sip or two of water. That sip of water will not quench your thirst – it is not the drink that pious people offer on the roadside in a vacant summer afternoon, it will not solace your soul. It will make you acerbic, saline; your mouth will feel wretched. Still you have to swallow this. A dose of bitter stuff can only kill a disease from its root. If you start with a sip or two of the seawater, you will be able to

swallow the entire sea. And the golden case will be at your reach. Then it is only a matter of time to crush the pitch-black dragonfly. Is she dead? No the witch with four hands, ten legs and a thousand heads will come groaning, to finish you off. Beware, cut the insect into two instantly; the witch will fall to the ground with her limbs spread put. Then only will you be titled a hero. Why are you blowing your own trumpet when you are just fiddling with the waves? You are not a hero, you are some mock-hero, like the mock-pundit!

The easiest option is: why should you tramp the sludge and wash the feet then? We all behave likewise: we jiggle in the waves; we are not ready to agree to get into the sludge and kill the witch. Yet we will call ourselves heroes. If no one labeled us a hero, then we will set a group of five or ten people in our favor and make them speak: 'We are heroes of a class. We took care of that poet so well that he fell to the ground flat like a monkey. We just spared the other poet as he performed for five times stretching exercises in public.' So this is our potential and with this we aim to restore the world. But mind you, this is just doing patchwork; this mending in bits and pieces will not do. Get rid of the torn, tattered mind; you need new ways to reason. You seek for it; you will be successful. If you don't seek, if you are satiated and sleep on, you will forfeit your share.

As though the poets are like a herd of monkeys; they will dance the way you want them to. You can make a monkey out of a poet because you bumped on one such poet. You can't do that with all. Must you forget that the poet is the seer, the creator, the Brahma – the father of creation of Hindu mythology? You may consider yourself Vishnu, but to feed your wisdom you will have to reach for them. To reach for the 'philosophy' as the wise heads call that wisdom. And you are prancing before those who lead the way to this philosophy, you shameless!

So kill that bumblebee today; kill that witch. Tomorrow you will realize that you have got the poet beside you. He is a part of your own soul; a friend during your happy days and a friend in need. But if you befriend him to pose for the world, you will not conquer him. You will only bang your head; flex your muscles for nothing. The measuring basket will fill, but the son will not return.

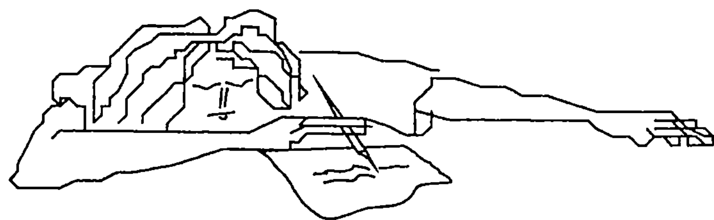
You will be whining like the grieving mother dove of the folktales wailing beside her dead son: 'The basket is full; get up my son, getup from sleep.' Much water must have flown down the river; he will not come back. Like the chariot of Lord Jagannath during the Car Festival, which never retreats, he will march ahead. You will trail behind.

You must endeavor to understand the poet's agony, listen to him. He is not mad. Well even if he is, try to understand

his madness. You will see that he has become pure gold, pure, not gilded. For your sake only he is undergoing the test of fire again and again and he will do it always. He does not want to brighten himself; he wants to see you glow. Then only he will calm down. You can't silence him by fastening a tight net over his mouth. You may try to fasten the silencer to his lips, because you want to become a hero without killing the old witch. The poet will spread through everyone; he can't sit quiet. He will march ahead; he is kinetic, not static. Today you kill one grasshopper and call yourself a champion; but mind you, he will lead the way for all of you. So try to act the moon since he is the sun. You should rather borrow from him for your own maintenance. Being the glowworm that you are, should you be equating yourself with him? You will only end up jumping into the fire. If you fail to understand this, what alternative do I have? To quote from the *Srimad Bhagabata*: 'Work with enough introspection and crisis will run away from you.' Go ahead with your plans with a puzzled mind and closed reason, and be ready to weep away your crises. You will learn it the hard way, he will only make you learn. If you act stupid in spite of your learning, like the partly burnt log that despite its countless rounds of smoothening remains as such, it is your choice – what is my problem? As they say, there is neither ladder to the heaven nor any quarrel with the rich. You are walking on the heaven now, why will you listen to this dweller of the earth? Are you

saying that you will not listen to me? You will surely. You have a loud mouth now and pompous ways, because you are an empty pitcher. A little jerk will break you into two. Only then will you listen to me. We will meet again some time. We will find out about this on that day, we'll talk.

(1963)



A NIGHT AT BLOOMINGTON HOSPITAL

It will be about four in the afternoon. There is no time to look at the watch. I have to accompany my wife to the hospital in a little while from now. If only man's physical parameters could wait for his convenience and state of mind! But this is something that has remained beyond the means of science even now.

I have stayed here for more than two years now. I am getting used, to some extent, to life in the US and the etiquettes of settling down amid neighbors and friends. The Americans are at home with an automated civilization. They have acquired this inclination more through imitating an enduring tradition than discipline. With a liberated mind, they have sought for the taste of freedom, but have become lonely in life. I have noticed them experience this

loneliness in their homes also. In this loneliness, they look for companionship once again. After they get a companion, they learn less to depend on each other. In a home, amid a family, everyone is independent; each one finds out his or her respective options. In the journey of a life that is busy, onerous and competitive, where is the time to exchange your feelings with the other? To do something for exchange of human feelings, they invent new institutions that work for some time and then more new institutions are required. The Americans are both engaged and habituated to this practice of inventing new systems on a daily basis. Either they don't have or care to have the time to ask for cooperation of friends and neighbors, or ask after their well-beings. With that little acquaintance, when you feel a streak of intimacy within, you'll have to leave the surrounding and find out a different place for yourself. The Americans are always on the move; they are the gypsies of the modern times. This gypsies' life is also controlled by machines: your time's up, you have to go places – the arrangement is possible within hours. The Americans find their greatest companion in a telephone directory. The requirements essential for the ongoing movement of your social life are available at your reach within one moment.

The moment has come for me. But I have no penny tucked in my waistcloth. Besides, this is a university campus. Many a student or researcher-student, like me, live here. Many are striving hard amid dreams of overindulgence, because if you strive, you will acquire even a god – they

have the faith. So I should not have time to know my neighbors or their identities. My residence is known as 'Married Students Housing'. The houses in the complex had been constructed during the Second World War. You can sense it from the looks of the dwellings. Of course, highly developed, prosperous residential skyscrapers stand next to these houses. You need 'assets' to live in those buildings. Where do students from outside America have these assets? Whatever student-stipend they get from the university here, they save from the amount to send to their fathers, brothers, mothers, sisters and many others back home as maintenance. Then they have to save for the return journey too. So even though they live in America, they still are members of joint families. The thought of 'the American Couple' is at times a welcome idea, but this idea has not yet entered their blood streams. So staying far far away, at twelve thousand miles across, they remain parts of the quintessential joint family. It is not that there are no exceptions; but they are rare.

So to expetience community living, Indians look for fellow Indians. Anglo-Saxons look for other Anglo-Saxons. Lithuanians and Japanese look for their country folks. If you look for communities which rise above such parochialism, you may go for the Asian or African people. Beyond this, the people could be labeled 'international'.

I acquired a few friends. I was particularly close to Mr Mukul Banerjee, an oustee from East Pakistan and now an

Indian citizen and a permanent resident in America. He is a bachelor. He had a linguistic similarity with the Bengalis of Calcutta; but was named a 'Bangal' (and not a Bengali, as is a native of Calcutta called) by the latter. But amid all these identities, he was *mamun* – the maternal uncle -- to my eldest daughter Mamina. It was a relationship outside the bonding by blood – a 'fictive kinship'. I don't want to know what others think of this relationship; but in this alien land, he was not only a blood relation to me, he was my asylum as well as my charioteer.

Amid the affluence of this country and its ideal of egotism, everything has a planned scheme too. Can a country that knows no dearth of capital, ventilate through its welfare schemes the accumulated agony of the community spirit? Everyone is self-contained here. No one can oppose the action of the other – you call it a free society. I don't know if other nationals have enjoyed freedom the way the Americans have. In Canada people have tasted the freedom akin to the Americans. I have heard, that in Japan too this has been possible; I haven't been to Japan but have discussed this with many Japanese friends. They say, in the Japanese society the search for liberation has moved keeping in tune with tradition. Reformation in the name of modernization has come through; but in the process, tradition has not derailed completely as an aftermath of automation, though tradition and modernism have clashed intermittently.

But America (or Canada) is an entirely free country. The Americans don't usually experience hurdles to their goals – except that individual liberty should not impinge upon the sovereignty of their own country or, at the international sphere, be a conduct that is contrary to the government principles.

I lacked this experience of liberty somehow. Because though I lived in America, I was an Indian citizen. Besides I lacked the financial status or the resources to pursue this freedom. If you are rid of the monetary bondage, you probably can nurture another free thought. Perhaps in the past, there was a need for community living to counter this economic bondage. Now times have changed; so community living is still being chased after, but for different reasons – psychoanalysts can make a more beautiful analysis of these reasons.

I must set out for Bloomington Hospital; I have a tiny job there – to operate a boil on the scalp of my second daughter whom we call Lucy (her first name is Smrutirekha). We need a large sum of money for this little operation. About two hundred and fifty American dollars. Mukul Banerjee drove in. Our entire family reached the hospital.

A detailed description of the hospital here is not necessary. To say the least, as if it was a palace in the heavens. Here I am reminded of a certain episode regarding my wife. She

had to be hospitalized a couple of times. About two to three days for each time. And each time after she had been discharged from the hospital, she told me: 'If only I could stay there for a few more days!' This meant that she bore me a grudge as she could not stay for more days in the hospital. This episode will show you how superior the arrangements at the hospital were against the house we lived in.

Lucy – my daughter. She is about eleven months. She was born with a red mole on the skin of her head. The mark widened with time and was to be operated in consultation with a doctor. In America, a change has come across the peoples' culture; it has transformed itself in the machine civilization. So you will not find an old granny or a village-aunt who could give you a tip on an ailment, or a traditional practitioner of alternative medicines who can prescribe a herbal potion. Everything there is machinised; everything is grounded on the foundation of science. The American mind too is a scientist's. The facts and principles of science are replacing the collective unconscious of the people. But it is of course both desirable and your duty that you must access to your personal physician and the help and cooperation of your insurance agent.

There are no government-run hospitals in America. Everyone hires his own personal physician. If you need to go to a hospital, you'll have to rent a room there. The rent

is about 60 dollars to 120 dollars a day. If you are not insured, you may face an insurmountable and unexpected problem. I have heard that foreign students in America often face such problems as they do not insure themselves for dearth of money to pay insurance permium.

However the operation was done without a hitch, thanks to the personal supervision of our private physician Dr Muller. If you don't have the fees in your pocket to pay at the hospital, both your physician and the hospital owner make arrangement for settlement of which you can repay in installments. In America, your credibility and character are judged more on your inclination and habit of borrowing, and your history of taking a loan and repaying it in time, than on your avenue of income. You can take loans easily. But if you don't abide by the rules for repayment, you will land up in difficulties. Therefore, we had financial problems alright, but we had no apprehension about our 'present', though we knew, our 'future' was shrouded in gloom.

We were through with the operation; we had to just attend to our daughter. This meant we would spend the night at the hospital. My wife stayed with our daughter; I sat in the hospital lobby. Many guardians were waiting there, like me. I sat on a sofa and my thoughts wandered everywhere, through the heaven to the netherworld. With every passing hour my mind made rounds of the cosmic universe around. Amid these fleeting trips, I also bumped on a visual of Cuttack Hospital in Orissa.

'Where are you from? Latin America?'

A woman was asking me the question. She was about thirty or thirty-five. But she wanted to convey through her clothing and layers of make-up that she had hardly stepped into her adolescence. She smoked continuously and hurled questions at me. My reply was brief, 'I am an Indian; a student.'

She understood the word 'student', but perhaps was not interested in my studenthood or citizenship. She was looking for a companion, one who would help her spend the time through the deep, dormant night. So she blabbered on; 'I met him in Indianapolis just the other day. He loves me immensely. He earns a lot. He drives trucks between Indianapolis and Chicago. He is very healthy, handsome, earns a yearly sum of twenty to twenty-five thousand dollars.... Yes, he should be on his way to Chicago now... yeah, I have to make a call to him, I must know when he will return tomorrow...

'I have to come here again tomorrow. My friend's baby is here, the baby's parents could not come. The baby's uncle is my friend, he asked for my help – one should help, you see. Yes, I just forgot, let me go and call my husband, you be here. I have to look after my husband, what do you say? Aha! How dearly he loves me! I love him even more...

'His first wife got married again. But there is still closeness between her and my husband. She is my friend too. Now

let me go and call my husband; I hope he has had no problems on the way. In fact he drinks a little more when he drives, oh, how he loves beer! We will finish our house shortly. We will plan our family after a couple of years. Now we should enjoy for some time. Oh, how madly he loves me! Yes, let me go and call him up...'

I have rarely met a more garrulous woman in my life. The Americans are generally reticent. If you don't control your speech, you may impinge on others' freedom – it is difficult to find another race which reveres and dreads this maxim more that the Americans. Because if you talk more, there is a chance of a debate and consequently, a war of *Mahabharata*. Now, coming to this chatty woman, the Bettys, Laras, Jills... of America set their homes with Mr X,Y, Z, and after some time, they crave for a Mr Tom, Dick or Harry. Or, the Johnsons, Dicks, and Bobs too crave for Ms Kanti, Kumudini, Sarojini... I have heard these creatures of the 'husband' class joking: in the friend circle 'Oh, I can't imagine how you have lived with the same woman for twenty years?' He – who has tasted freedom, and has gazed at the light of liberty – is a free human being. He needs new items each moment; he pursues new plans and an urge for enjoying life anew. As if there is no end to this urge!

So there I was, seated on a sofa in the lobby of Bloomington Hospital, and immersed in these ruminations: what

differences between cultures! How tradition links with modernity! Or, is it really the case?

Suddenly the wake up call from the lady: 'Are you spending your whole night like this here? It is very late now. Why don't you lie down somewhere for a while? Who is there with your child?'

'Her mother,' I replied.

'Oh! Let me move on then. Have to attend to my friend's child. If only my husband had not left for Chicago! How dearly he loves me! Oh, here, take a cigarette.'

I had to accept the cigarette. In the flicker of the lighter, I could see the contents of an epic story of a civilisation.

'Your daughter's room is just next to my patient's. No, his uncle has not shown up. There, he's come. See you, it was nice to know you, whatever your name.'

Why must you know the other's name or caste or lineage? As they say: twelve castes and thirteen sub-castes; if you are an American, nothing else matters. You are human beings – men and women.

Now the lady is sleeping with the 'uncle' of her patient. They have wrapped their bodies with a thick blanket – a cover for propriety. I returned to the lobby. The evening star had blinked in the sky. I was half asleep and half awake

and in that state was comparing between the men and women of India and America.

In the morning the Lady said: 'Good Morning! Mr…! Oh, how nice you are! Perhaps your child is staying over for today. So we are meeting again.'

In Bloomington Hospital we did not have to spend another night. We, with due advice from the doctor, returned home with Lucy, our daughter.'

1975





SHOULD I RETURN, FRIEND...

One day, after coming back from the neighbor's, Lucy had presented her childlike grievances before her mother. She was trying to check with her mother if she had replied correctly to the queries of her friends in the neighborhood: 'Mother,' she said, 'my friends Archana and Namita asked me what my father does. I said, he just roams around.'

In that tiny head of hers, where tinier thoughts wavered, could she have entertained an idea simpler than this? She has been noticing this for more than a year now, that her father spends his time on writing and moving around. Why should she then think otherwise about her father? He has fulfilled her small demands to his best of ability – in this accursed socialist country. Of course she goes though her pangs of dilemma occasionally: if she was better off over 'there' compared to here. Sometimes

she, like a fool, is at a loss of words: they led a life of luxury there. Bunches of grapes, baskets of pears, pastries and cookies of known and unknown varieties. For drinks and beverages they had bottles of lemon juice, coke, seven-up and grape juice. Ah, how beautiful was the world there! Television, parks, toys, dresses! As soon as you stepped out of home, the car was ready outside to ferry you; within hours they moved places, from Hartford to New York, from New York to New Jersey, from New Jersey to the far far away Florida. These days Lucy catches an occasional glimpse of the places through a small movie projector. Everything springs back to her memory; she is at times wrapped up with traces of these memories. Then a deep sigh tears through her breath, as if she were some fool: who is a fool here really – she or her father? She could well ask this question, but perhaps this question just flares up in her little mind and is doused out the next moment. She repents, if only she could return to that country – the country where she was born – and whose legal system not only assures her a dignified future, but is also interested to execute the process.

Lucy does not understand any of this – she has left behind many friends and acquaintances there – Marglin, Becky, Ruth. She has not bothered by the thought of whether she will meet them again or not. She has tried to remember them occasionally through their photographs in the family photo album. Sometimes she just recalls the face in the

photograph but has forgotten the name. It is difficult to say if she will remember even the faces in a few days hence.

Lucy is living in a new world now. Three years ago this world carried no appeal to her. She only wept, day in and day out – 'No I don't want to stay here, always the same old thing, the chapattis and curry; I want to go back.'

Oh, those tears of my Lucy! Her mother too did not nurture any less dejection. Who else but an arrogant fool can forsake a career of professorship and a life of cars and bank balances and return to this country? 'You are very obstinate,' she told me, 'you want to rebuild this country. If you wanted to become a Gandhiji, a Mahatma, you shouldn't have married in the first place; you shouldn't have gone for having children of your own, let alone denying them their comforts.'

Her words were true, though cruel. Of course you may say that as a definition of truth, at the lowest rung, this is yet another label for experience.

I have spent at least more than three years here now. A Professor of Anthropology there had warned me about this before leaving America. She had studied extensively about the cultural existentialism in India. So she was skeptical, and rightly so, about my return from a 'free' country to a 'closed' country. One of her questions in her letter to me was: 'Your philosophy must have changed through your

extended stay in this country; can you adapt this change to your country's situations? I hope that if ever you attempt to write about the Americans and their lives, then you must subtext the comparative analysis of your experiences of America from a scientific point of view.'

Now that question often lurks in my mind. The country and the culture that sustained my core and fed my unadulterated emotionality towards them had raced ahead. Imitating the West is becoming a norm more and more. While the down-to-earth, uncomplicated and workaholic Indian is shunning the rural traditions in favor of the urban way of life, the Americans are craving for liberation from the brutality of their urban mores. They are seeking the ways to return to Nature's shelter. The English Romantic literature had pledged for this consciousness much earlier. Long long ago Gandhiji had called upon the people to return to the village. But the idea was razed to dust under the steamroller of modernity. So I have to return from this country. True, I share a connection with the air of this country, its language; but it is no more possible to walk in tune with the change that has come over this country, the progress that has taken place without a leader. Rather, I would call the young men and women in America, known as the Hippies, bearded and clad in tight jeans, to be the possessors of human values and symptoms. They had pleaded to own me, but I had refused their pleading and returned here with a resolution. I had resolved to change

the direction of the social history of India. But here we have been engaged by Marxism in its naked form; history is being analysed in terms of economics to such an extent that Gandhi has become redundant here. Gandhiji has more admirers in America.

If this world is a stage for performing humans, then what can be a sense of fulfillment if I think that I am an Indian, so-and-so is an American or a Russian? So I have to return now. I will leave behind all my plans, ideas and all happenings. If I attempt a recital of those events, I would only be narrating the twentieth century versions of the villians from the *Mahabharata* like Shakuni and Duhshashan.

Yes! I have to return now – to the darkness, the darkness that carries within itself the radiance of liberation. Liberation is not contentment only; it is a desire that has not achieved salvation. I have to return along with that desire. The time to return has arrived.

1976





WHO AM I?

'Hello Sir, do you recognize me?'

'Namaste'. There is no way you can look through the person before you. No, umh, yes... There is no sight of a definite shore; so how do you rescue yourself amid this confusion?

'What Sir, don't you remember we were traveling the other day on train? From Baleswar to Howrah. Didn't we discuss modern poetry? And I read out a few of my poems to you, which you appreciated so much, Sir. How can I forget that? I am publishing a collection of my poems, I have decided, pardon my arrogance, to have a foreword by you.'

What a mess! If you refuse, you are not a gentleman; if you agree, they will use you as a roadway. It is true that I had acknowledged your presence somewhere someday, but should you use that as an alibi

and force yourself upon me now as if you were the brother of my wife? The way one gets shoved into such a fix is a rigmarole. If you recognize others, you err; if you don't recognize them, you of course err. *Mr. ...I am here for a few days; what is the need of this introduction? If we bump into each other, fine; we can talk a word or two. Should we be bound to recognize each other? What is the big deal here I say*?

In fact no one remembers no one else. If they pretend that they are familiar with you, they surely want some favour from you. Suppose you are close to a minister and I want a favor from him which may not be very transparent. So I will waste no time to find out about your whereabouts. The son-in-law of the sister of my uncle's brother-in-law is your son's friend; I am introduced to you through him. Then the planning – how to get my work done. If this is passed off for acquainting the other, then what do you call wastage of humanity? Yet, to make oneself known around man has been striving systematically through out his life. That is why he has been studying, adding A', 'B', 'C', 'D'... to his name and if that is not achieved, he will anoint himself President of a certain Party or Advisor of a certain Union. The Parties and the Unions thus run with such ploys and the Presidents present themselves to the world. But what is the net outcome that emerges from these tricks?

Another most amusing aspect of these self-introducing schemes is the act of blowing one's own trumpet. Fine, I am not a man of literature, though I write occasionally just

to satisfy the itch in my mind. But a friend of mine introduced me before you as a promising young writer and I endured it with a drooping head. because I was bowled over by the word 'promising' in his introduction. Perhaps you will pardon my out and out liar-friend, or his hyperbolic phrases (I will also forgive him because I am flattered with what he said about me). But imagine some worthless rascal arranging a few certificates to testify his merit (it is easy these days to arrange a certificate of merit) and waxing eloquent about his non-existent achievements. How do you rate that utter shamelessness? Whatever, none of us is willing to give up this shamelessness. To put the matter straight, we are maneuvering to cover up our dishonesty within us with certificates of merit. So if this sense of identity is argued to be essential for a man and is considered a norm, everyone is frantically striving to acquire this through prefixing long adjectives to their names.

In this context let me tell you another story – about poor Bairagi. Bairagi is a 'roomboy' at hotel Ashoka in Calcutta whose identity of 'No.1' remains an enigma to me even today. Let me narrate the story a little further. When I arrived at Ashoka, I asked for the name of the boy in charge of room service. 'No.1', pat came the reply. In fact, it was easy to remember. However, is his real name – Bairagi that his parents had named him with – so intricate that we can't remember it? If we can remember the designation of the Minister of Culture of the Republic of Ghana, the diploma that the Director of a puppet troupe from Indonesia holds,

the places where the captain of the West Indian cricket team scored centuries, then what burden Bairagi carries in his name so that he has to introduce himself as 'No.1' before others? If we must remember the car number of a certain Cabinet Minister or the parents' names of Charles VIII, then why should we oblige ourselves to cut down Mr Bairagi to 'No.1' when he is so essential to us no matter if only for a few days?

We have an obligation here – if we don't belittle the other, we can't prove ourselves to be superior. The corollary to this is, we can call the other superior and tag ourselves to him to share his superiority. So to get recognition, or to sign an autograph we race against each other with utter madness. This madness may not be explicable to others; but if we try to understand unassumingly, we can figure out our own images.

We have to remember so many things in the world, that if we don't remember our identities no blasphemy will take place. Suppose you chanced upon a childhood friend of yours whose name you failed to recall instantly. What sin did you commit by that? But your friend will definitely fake unhappiness and say: 'Yeah, why should you remember me? You have become big. Why will you remember this poor friend anymore?' Well that is enough to paint your face pink. You will of course search for explanations for your conduct, which your friend is no mood to buy.

So this tendency to latch on to an identity is a mental ailment. You may see doctors or *vaidyas*, accept their medication of gulping *Brahmi Rasayana* – the memory enhancing tonic, or massage *Madhyam Narayan* oil to your scalp, you cannot help forgetting a list of names. Of course you will remember some (where you will have a favour to obtain from) and some other names will settle down in your subconscious.

The holy sages have said that the true identity of man is his work – *karma*. Therefore we will continue to stumble on our ways as long as we relinquish work and are obsessed to have a name. The dictionary says: one's identity stands for his training and knowledge. If you devote yourself to work, your knowledge will expand automatically and you will no more strive for an identity. Your vocation will stand for your identity. The game will end there and the rest is nonsense.

So this game of 'Who am I?' is also a senseless issue. If you remember who I am, you invite problems; if you don't, you will bear the blame. The best alternative is to turn mute, just remain silent. If you succeed doing this, you will be engrossed in your work. The need to market yourself will not arise.

This is like the advice of a jester. Even if you dislike the advice, the idea is not all that redundant. The *Bhagabata* – the Scripture of the Oriyas – ordains: man's speech, an index to his persona, is known at the time of his death. It is

only after death that the worth of a man is known. And this relates to the work he has done through his life. You will not be evaluated correctly during your lifetime no matter how many certificates of merit you arrange for yourself. Because they will not certify your character adequately. Of course who am I to dismiss the merit of your certificates? Have I grown a bone in my tongue or what? Hydrogenated oil is replacing ghee now a days, you can wear nylons if you don't want to walk naked (of course the Superintendents of some universities have decreed that women students cannot wear nylon sarees), anti-liquor policies and foreign liquor shops go hand in hand. There is nothing that cannot have an utility in these times. The one-*anna* coins and two-*anna* coins were made to devalue so that they could be reused. Our Scriptures have declared that everything in the creation – the animate as well as the inanimate – is movable; so why should this performance of 'who I am' remain static? Let this go on. Why should we resist the idea and be known as cynics?

[Mr Editor, the incarnate of righteousness! Be kind enough to forgive my mistakes. Let God strengthen your pen. All you village deities there – *Basulei, Jagulai, Hingulei* – let you all shield the Editor with your ringer bells].

1964

I'M STILL IN LOVE

My dear Bishwaranjan:

Today is *Bijaya Dashami*, the tenth day of the full moon phase of the Hindu month of *Aashwina*. Out here in Bhubaneswar, the shops are closed for the festive day. Again, all the big shopping stores are open. They blind you with the glare of their glitz – the pageant of traditional festivities and fares under new colourful garbs goes on. The organizers do not know why they are doing this. The participants do not know why they are participating. And the onlookers like us – we just clap on at the show; we laud this process of modernization of tradition. But have we ever asked, 'who had said *Sa vidya ya vimukteya* – knowledge is freedom? What is the relevance of this canto now?

You have asked me to write you a letter of a different kind – a letter about my love life,

or my conjugal life. You have asked for copies of the endless desperations of my love life, my depravations; lines from my monologues and ramblings churned out of my reminiscences or picked up from bundles of old letters. But why have you done that?

This morning I was taking a round of the streets of Bhubaneswar, peeping inside the rows of shanties sprouting along the rims over time. I ought not have done that. But no one obstructed me – because 'they' were unable to speak. And the lot of us who used to write 'love letters', to our real or imaginary loves – are garrulous. What kind of literature do you want to create with the testaments of love and romance of these garrulous chatterboxes? Then you cannot then beat Upendra Bhanja, Radhanatha or poet Mansingh. If you want to publish my letters where I have extolled my love, so that you can identify me to the world, you will be disappointed and so will be your readers. Because the saga of my love is not different from the saga of love and romance of the men and women in the shanties lining the broad roads of Bhubaneswar. It does not have any different flavour.

Love is freedom; absence of shackles. We have mortgaged ourselves – before societal norms, institutionalized obligations, our titles. We have sold our souls to the vanity of authoring a few books; to the awards and accolades that come our way, to our publishers, to the literary

footnotes and bibliographies. The taste and dream of freedom a captive craves for measures only to the lover's passion for his beloved or mistress. Love is freedom from shackles and passion of the lovers chains this freedom.

I had been in love once. You should not be taken aback at this, because if I swear that I wasn't ever in love that would be untrue. Or, if I say that I had no interest or excitement in me about falling in love, it would be a blabbering of truth; someone may also think that I am either inhuman or not interested to divulge the chronicles of my life.

Your interest in my love life would have embarrassed me if I had not chained myself in the shackles of love. But I have learnt to fall in love; like others – like the man next door. As a human, I am not extraordinary, so my love also trails an ordinary track. It is not different from love and passion of the countless men and women who arise their huts along the roadways of Bhubaneswar. So what new elucidation of love do you expect to find in my 'love letters'? Perhaps you will be peaceful to know that I too am mad about love and romance, perhaps like other writers. I rejoice in the ecstasy of passion. But I am sure, you cannot find anything unusual in this.

If I could give you a list of my girlfriends, narrating the varying range of their age, beauty, and elegance and education, that would perhaps satisfy your curiosity. But I

do not believe that you would find anything new in that. The Vaishnavites, the believers in the cult of Vishnu, only can differentiate between love for the beloved and adulterous love. An ordinary human does not go by this doctrine or ideology while falling in love. How love comes upon human beings has remained a puzzle to me even now. So I have been in love, even now. All that cannot be explained or narrated, that can only be felt.

Therefore I am continuing with my labour of love, like I did in my past and I carry the conviction to maintain it in future. Maybe my heroines have altered; alterations have come upon the places, times and peoples close to me, and the state of my emotions and sentiments. My love life has perhaps transformed because of these alterations. But I had always craved for love and was in it. I am in love now and tomorrow, possibly, I'll be in love.

Therefore the chronicle of my love life is very long. Its documentation has spanned my entire youth, and will go on in future. Time will perhaps discover my love letters after the end of my life. Wouldn't you be patient enough to wait till then? Because I still have not run out of the ecstasy of youth.

Today, in the occasion of *Bijaya Dashami*, I am sending my good wishes for your wife and beloveds. These wishes are meant to fill your life with love – to douse your life

with the mood of passion. Please accept it and convey the touch of my love to others.

With Best Wishes

Bhabagrahi Misra

(*Chithi* : April 1992)

[The inquisitive, knowledge seeking 'Oriya', who had the build of an American and the radiance and beauty of an Indian sage, and who engrossed himself in academics at American institutions, returned to his land of birth – Orissa, at the end. No one knew if he was beckoned by a new 'dream' or 'love'. No one knew what happened to his dreams; if they ended in hopelessness, or futility or sighs. However he has not stopped dreaming. His heart has not been emptied of love yet.

The school will run – children and adults will receive education – books and journals will be published – the numbers of literates and litterateurs will rise – people will be conscious more and more politically – these ideas fuelled his dream-odyssey. We had met him when he was negotiating first step on the ladder. Acharya Harihar Mahavidyalaya, Mayur Publications, editing of *Chayanika or Samabesha*, the literary forum of Godabarisha Sahitya Sansad followed one after another. This journey has been

bumpy, long but it has not stopped. The infatuation has not waned; the guts and grit have been incredible.

Who else other than Dr Bhabagrahi Misra can live such a life – of adventure and struggle? Come, let's have a look at his letter *I am still in love*

– Adhyapaka Bishwaranjan, 1992]





BHUBANESWAR – A CITY OF MULTIPLE COLORS

Bhubaneswar is a city painted freshly. This city has no definite form; it is a collage of poverty and affluence. This city belongs to ancient cultures. Bhubanewar is the habitat of lord Shiva – Lord Lingaraj, the shrine of Ekamra. It is a city of Hindu monasteries, temples, churches, mosques, and many lesser gods and goddesses. Moreover, it is also the new capital of the state of Orissa, the abode of its Secretariat, of the nationalized banks of the country, of the public sector corporations and cooperatives, of the Members of the Legislative Assembly, Ministers and Indian Administrative Officers. At one end of this city lies the landing field of the airplanes – the modern giants; on the other the training school of the infantrymen. Utkal University – the source of inspiration for the practitioners of literature and politics –

stands on one edge; on the other the University of Agriculture funded by the Missouri School of the United States of America, and the Regional College of Education and Training.

The orphanage run by Mother Teresa stands at the middle of the city, and at a little distance away, at Jaanla, the leprosy patients live in a neighborhood managed by the Trust of the Mother. Now this is the city of Bhubaneswar, it wears a special look, but retains the old outlines and obligations.

Bhubaneswar existed earlier, long long ago. Its old citizens now inhabit Old Bhubansewar. The lanes, slums, suburbs of Bhubaneswar are bundled up on the upper side of the South Eastern railway track that negotiates the city – to highlight simultaneously the story of survival of the old and its clash with the freshness of the new capital town and the resulting note of pain. This note epitomizes the clash between the old and the new. This is a musical note, that, in order to expose the divergence between modernity and traditionalism is overwhelmed in a different rhythm and beats. This note is off-harmony. The note has a tone, but the tone is an accumulation of the anger, malice and envy the poor harbors in the cores of their hearts for the rich. This town has a particular ritual – of loveless desires, of rejection of ecstasy in love and sufferings of separation of lovers.

This city prides in Kedar-Gauri, the tragic immortalized lovers and Ashoka, the great. The city belongs to its high rising hotels, the State Guest House, the Guest House of the State Electricity Department, hotels run by the business community, lodging houses and the not-far-away Dhauli hill – of history, of legends and now the monastery of the Buddhists. Many people come to this city, from villages of Orissa, from other states of the country and from other countries. Perhaps the world atlas does not figure a country whose nationals will find Bhubaneswar an alien place.

This is a city about a lot of clamor and clatter – a city of bicycles, scooters, auto-rickshaws, Plymouths and mopeds, bullock carts, cycle-rickshaws, hand-drawn rickshaws, and cycle-trolleys.

The city witnesses thefts and brawls in broad daylight; government clerks toil through government files in the Secretariat, and for a morsel of food the future generation of the citizens of India struggle with the stray dogs at the dustbin by the road. The struggle ends in teamwork and mutual rapprochement. Huge buses congregate at the center of the city – buses from Phulbani to Raipur to Calcutta. Visitors to this city are a kaleidoscopic lot; you get a taste of gourmets of the entire range of Indian cuisine: tamarind water seasoned with curry leaves, *dosa*, *vada*, *pakoda*s, fried dough balls, the famous popped rice flakes marinated in jaggery, the sweetmeat from Sareikala,

biryani, fried rice, cutlet, omelet, watered rice, fried spinach, *badi*, sun-dried balls of black gram paste fried in oil, sour curd cooked with vegetables. This city is queer; so are its men and women. The city wears the colors of a chameleon, old habits do not die here.

You get to see congregations of artistes here; hear the battle cry of the litterateurs as they glow in their intellect, and also the pathetic moan of starving beggars. You hear the grunting woman in labour pain, the humming of love and the cosmic resonance of renouncement – *sannyasa* – asceticism. This is the place – Bhubaneswar – weird, with a new tint and unique looks, but bearing the ritual of primordial instincts.

No one has read the horoscope of this city; no one has calculated the alignments of its zodiac signs. But the arrogance of its inhabitants has often been put to scrutiny – the arrogance that has made souls to bleed. The pain has healed over time, but the scar has remained at the place where the wound was and sometimes, in the deepest layer of the mind.

People come to Bhubansewar as pilgrims, a few visit here as tourists. Because the city holds a thrill for the outsider, a kind of sentimentalism and loquaciousness which creates ripples in human words and reverberate the atmosphere. These reverberations also absorb tales, rumors, gossip and

conjured episodes. Words of mouth, gossips shake up the lanes and by-lanes of the city and its temples of culture and daily market premises. Words of mouth give birth to conflicts of ideas and harmony is sought in the end. Bhubaneswar marches ahead once again on the road to progress.

Everyday you meet new faces in this city, you make new acquaintances. Your affection wanes as your new friend turns old; you need another fresh face. The cacophony of men and women is an everyday event here – they labour, they expend time, wallow in entertainment, draw new sketches of life, love, donate, give away the fees due to their teachers, rob, beg, boast, suspect, inflate their families, die and are cremated at either Garabadu or Satya Nagar – the cremation grounds at the two ends of the city and aim at deliverance. Because, the city has come out in an uncorrected edition; it has a fresh color, but is embedded in its old outlook of the age of palm-leaf manuscripts.

In the dark of the night secret love blooms here, voyeurism tiptoes. In the open light of the day prostitutes call out to clients. Because, this city belongs to human beings, not to the gods. The city makes a cocktail of human tendencies – its poison as well as ambrosia. The city is painted in a different shade in its unique synchronization of ideals and realities.

Countless writers and artists live in this city. One who comes here, is sold out to the charm of the place. These people first fall in love with the Bhubaneswar, then they find it hard to outgrow their greed , despair and agony for the place.

The stretch of the national highway along the city, the broad pathways crisscrossing its insides, the Secretariat Street are located in the growing expanses of the city. Groups of writers, artists, painters and messiahs of mankind make rounds of these streets, chanting hymns in praises of Buddha, Shankar, Baya Baba, Sai Baba and Sri Ma. Noises reverebrate and the streets resonate with their songs in accompaniment of drums, bells and cymbals in the morning and meadow hours. The groups long for peace, and they do not get peace. Again, in the heart of the city, fallen men and women go about the business of vegetation: they sow seeds, look after the saplings, weed out wild grass from the fields. Occasionally the paddy field – a government corporation – turns a field of weeds. The holy seers – Swarupananda, Kriyananda, Reverend Regan, Maulana Karamat, Ishwariya Prajapita – land here to cleanse the process; they preach to the people the Vedic canon of *Soaham – I am the part of the super-consciousness*. The city wakes up abruptly and goes to a slumber again. Here routine clamors camouflage as excitements, in forms of protests, fasts, demonstrations, processions, vows of bloody struggles, and humble appeals

for non-violent mass movements. But the city of Bhubaneswar remains ensconced in the cocoon of a deep slumber. Because, it is not a land of eternity, or wisdom; Bhubaneswar is a place soaked in the sweat of the working class, the place of the meager daily livelihood of a laborer, but anxious and restless to possess the vanity of a city.

Researchers from across countries come to this place to study its people and their lives. They look at the heritage huts and campuses around, discuss the education system of the place, the economic scarcities of its rural life, the character of bureaucracy – their discussions translate into published books. But this study does not affect the think-tank; or the way the think-tank outline the fate of the place. They are immune to any outside opinion.

Flocks of lepers and hundreds of beggars roam in the streets of Bhubaneswar everyday. Shacks sprout along the big streets over time and countless men, women and children huddle themselves to these bound spaces to earn a livelihood. They constitute the population of Bhubaneswar, a part of the citizenry of the Indian nation. The divide between this populace and the *babu*s who hold a post or a title is on the rise. It looks as if Bhubaneswar is a town of 'divides'.

Corruption spurts like water fountains here. Some witness this from a distance, some do not react to this, and some others comment in a lighter vein: 'God's will prevails'.

But those who feel for the cause and lodge a fight suffer, hurt, torment and agony and age prematurely. Because the city is not a product of an industrial revolution; it is a prehistoric human habitation in a new garb. The place has not caught up with the progress and flow of civilization. So the heritage sites lay open – the fort at Sishupalagada, the caves at Khandagiri and Udayagiri, and the ever-alert stone inscriptions of king Ashoka. These few structures, which testify to our commitment to the practice of non-violence since ages ago, stand as mementoes from the past. But amid the fireworks of clandestine artifacts, the spiritual discourses and sermons, the inscriptions on rocks and copper plates and the replicas that line the streets – the Buddhist structures, the bronze bust of Gopabandhu, the marble effigy of Samanta Chandra Sekhara, the astronomer, the concrete replica of the pre-Independence Salt March led by Gandhi – make a mere mockery of history and time. They are pointers to a degenerating civilization.

Civilization has been defeated here, because, the link between government and the farmers who provide the food bowl to others is yet to be established. Bhubaneswar has halted in her evolution. As it moved on from the forest dwellers' culture to an agrarian culture, it froze and became immobile. You can meet here, even now, the collapsing shadows of the excellence we had acquired in food grain production and cattle farming thousands of years before

the birth of Christ, which spearheaded the essential technical expertise of the pre-industrial times.

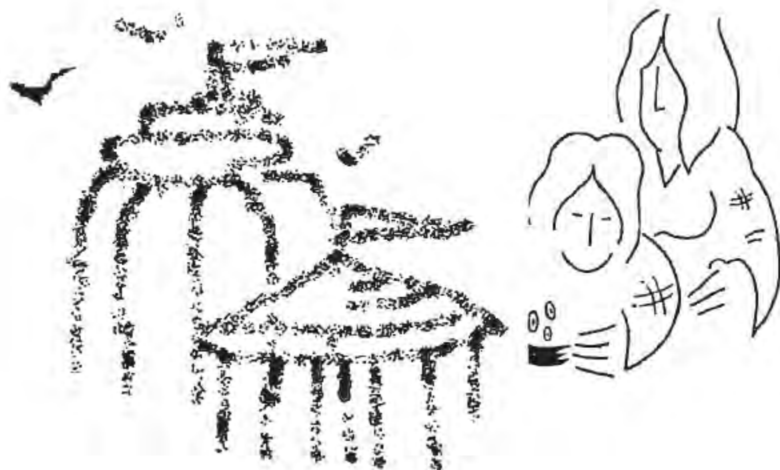
During the mid-day shower of blazing sunrays, Bhubaneswar stands mute and still – a dead land. This land is not of life or vegetation; not of renunciation or indulgence. This is a land of links; it links the old and the new. This is a link of conflicts, not of assimilation or harmony. Link is disparity here, the disparity that is elongating through the last thirty years. The place stands as an antithesis to the progress of civilization. The civilizations of Sishupalagada, of King Kharavel, of the Buddist and Jain monks who lived in the caves of Khandagiri and Udaygiri now coalesces into the starving skeletal beggars, stray bitches, maverick bulls and the pregnant cows who roam the footpaths of the place.

This is a town of illusion, trickery, witticism, and deception – of poison and not of ambrosia. The people here do not seek nectar; they just seek their everyday quota of two square meals. The 'Adams' who had built this town, the 'Eve's' whose tears had trickled to fill up the pool at Kedargouri, have disappeared into unknown domains. The place stinks of slavery now, and of exploitation. It is not a place for liberation and mores of civilization.

Bhubaneswar is a city of the proverbial frogs who, ignorant of the world outside, perfer the confinement of their

dwelling wells, even though Boeing jets have touched down here and foreign tourists have graced the place. Bhubaneswar has christened herself *Ekamra Tirtha* – and is wallowing in this newfound glory. But the place has only managed a new splash beside its old rites of passage.

(1981)



A REQUIEM FOR MY REPUTATION

We all are crazy for fame and awards. We want to promote ourselves with the list of these awards and the medallions, with which we can once more seek eulogies from others. And if we fail in this endeavor, the entire process is stage-managed all over again. The madness we exhibit to acquire fame is comparable to the canto in *Srimad Bhagavat Gita* where the Lord says: '*Wherever my devotees sing for me, I dwell there, Narada.*'

Your fans have ways to praise your achievements: they sing paeans; compose songs in your honor; shout slogans, idolize you in privacy, wink at you; pat you at the back, and review your work. Your weight and worth depend on the number of these followers and you are known outside your sphere just as well. This story of your fame passes through the illusory clamor of a town, its actual rumors, its unreal ideology and real

pretensions. It also traverses beyond the confines of a particular town and step into the precincts of a group of towns, a few countries – an international ambiance. Your quest for fame encompasses these processes. It starts with a tiny circle, and then moves on to the confinement of numerous circles of bigger sizes. To move beyond this confinement and merge into the cosmic void is also another attempt at inscribing your fame for posterity.

I love those who seek name and do not get it, the way I love the ones who are eager to write the swansongs of their name. Because both have the same end though they pursue different means. Between these two, the group that claps the most are the survivors.

When I deliberate on the conundrum called fame, I am often drawn towards its adversary – dishonor. There is no particular reason for this, but events do conduct in the absence of a cause. My sense of dishonor reveals to me the known and unknown facts of my life, which invoke remarks from my critics on my activities. These remarks usually bear a language that others use to estimate me, my intellect, my competence and incompetence – to assess my excellence. I love all of those, whose opinions and hearsays have fed the requiem of my honour, since, they have the courage, real or misplaced, to make an estimate of my egotism, arrogance and my character. I thank them profusely for this display of nerve. Let them prosper in

life. However, these critics of mine form the 'they' of my world (English grammar would label them the 'third person plurals') though their judgments on me encourage them to move on in life.

But I will slot myself at 'first person singular number'. I do not feel the poverty of 'numbers', but as for gender, I may be either male or female; I may even be neutral. I will make a statement on this neutrality, not in my favor, but against myself, objectively.

I adore objectivity. Objectively, let me first take into account my vices. Otherwise how do I defame myself? I don't want to provide a list of my vices here. I'll just leave some examples. Let us presume that I act under the dictates of my wife, or I have a greedy thirst for wealth. Now who can judge if this is my vice or virtue? Do I leave the task to my friends, beloved, wife, courtiers or society? And which society are we talking of here? Are we talking of the place that is an awkward congregation of people like me? So before anyone labels me henpecked or materialistic, I will tell the world, that these labels do not describe my virtues or vices, but are merely traits of my character. My persona carries these traits in its elements, my genes carry them and the infinitesimal point of my sustenance carries these traits. From an accumulation of infinitesimal *bindus* (dots) I have transformed into an ocean. The roaring of this ocean outline my dishonor, its stability my reputation. Further

some may look at the whole matter from an opposite angle. Therefore honor and dishonor, to me, carry relative meanings.

So today, when I have set out to inscribe the requiem to my honor and need you're your encouragement; I also mean to talk about relativity of meanings.

So before anyone labels me a 'tippler', or a man dancing to the tunes of his wife or cursed, I will do it myself and will be a speaker of truth. I will spare others this job and will pronounce the testimonial of my disgrace. Because, I am a truth-seeking individual. And this is not about the absolute truth, but of the relative truth. I represent the singular first person who is interested in realism, though plurality has trespassed into my manhood. Because, I am the protagonist of this story. I do not know any other protagonists. I have fielded myself in their roles. So this 'I' stands for a truth-seeker, a philosopher. That is why I am announcing my ignominy. And this 'I' is a multiform chameleon of seven shades.

(1976)



DECLARATION OF A DISCIPLINED REBEL

I am disciplined. Order fills my mind, heart and everything that I do. You – my dear fellow Citizens, disturb my sense of order. You want to chain me; tie my arms and legs with cuffs even as I love freedom. I am a patron of free thinking. I love to have a regimented mind. I want to be regulated, but not by the dictates of Duhshasana – the evil man in the *Mahabharata*. I want to be disciplined, but not with the tenets of unruliness.

You can stifle each breath of mine and kill me easily. By that you will wear the glorious mark of victory, written with my blood. This glory, in fact, is the glory of your sense of egoism and hunger for power; it epitomizes an absence of norms. This sense of glory springs from your youth, feeds the fantasies of your youth and becomes a vocation for

your post-youth mind. Like a mother cat, you indulge in devouring your offspring! You all are carnivores; you love the flesh of human beings. You make a parody of the lives of millions of people – their humanism, their poverty, their deprivation and grievances – and try to underscore your glory and supremacy. You have been doing this ceaselessly. Now, you must not forget history. You have always obstructed the process of glorifying the common man. You are primates in the garb of humans. How long can you engross in this monkey business? The humankind will no longer put up with your pranks. Time is expiring; the rim can be seen now; you can't put a check there. Because, you have pushed away the blessings you had once acquired; you have set aside the *mahaprasada* – the revered offerings to Lord Jagannath – with your feet. The *mahaprasada*, that should have protected you, has turned against you.

You don't build a nation with bloodshed; at least in India this is not possible. You have failed to read through the civilization of this country. This civilization is not of the *Veda*s, or *Bhagabata*, the *Quran* or the *Bible*. This is a civilization of a whole lot of regimented bylaws. This is a civilization of obedience. This civilization embodies the austerity of our ancient Sages who imparted holistic wisdom in *gurukula*s – hermitages. This is a civilization of both silence and dissent – the dissent by a dissenter who is bound by statutes. This is a civilization of *satyagraha*, the quest for the absolute truth.

I am a dissenter. My dissent is not aimed at you or the power you enjoy. It is aimed at the atrocities you perpetrate, your perversion, your cowardice, your brittleness and your deteriorating strength. It is aimed at your failings. My revolt is aimed against your weaknesses. I have not fancied to be immortalized in history with this revolt. I empathize with your agony, sorrow, despair and weaknesses. I have always forgiven your pangs of jealousy; because, I have understood that forgiveness breeds power. Not the other way round. If power taught you the ability to forgive, then my dear fellow citizens, you would have inscribed your fame for posterity by now. But you are traders and no one has succeeded to make the most of one's power with the attitude of a trader's. And you will not learn the skill even if you are taught one. The reason being, you have immersed yourselves in a world that is bereft of wisdom, education and knowledge. You need to retire – to use time meaningfully, to educate yourself adequately and to learn not to betray the arrogance of the learned.

Do you think you can accommodate this change in your life? You have to endeavor hard for this. If you ready yourself for the endeavor, you will transform for the better. History testifies that in this culture Ratnakara, the brigand, had transformed to Sage *Balmiki* (Valmiki) who wrote the epic *Ramayana*.

Yes, I am a rebel. But I am disciplined. I have worked hard to acquire this discipline. There is no end to this process

of acquisition; in fact the process is never-ending because learning is an eternal course. It is fresh always and demands of life homework of a lifespan's. Since I have done the homework, I declare myself a dissenter, and mind you, not a traitor. My love for the country and her soil is never any less than yours. So I call myself a rebel, a regimented rebel and my speech here is a declaration of my revolt. This is my note of warning to my fellow dwellers of this country. This is a letter of my sense of humility at its extreme. This is an humble submission of my extreme avowal; the delirious mumbo jumbo of someone who has given himself away to the country.

If ever this rambling hits your eardrums, my dear fellow citizens, then you may evade this. Because, this declaration would not have been made if I were able to carry the burden of my bruised heart.

You have seen the ocean and heard its roars. You have seen only the high tides and not the ebb tides of the ocean. You have not seen the water drops that swell to an ocean. I have seen both the drops and the ocean. I have witnessed the calm of the drops and amid that calm, have measured the profundity of the ocean. I have heard her groans.

Since I have perceived the essence of the ocean in the drops of water, and can single out the drops amid the watery expanse of an ocean, I am reading out to you this declaration – my humble submission, the song of my incessant ache, the commotion of my unsolicited heart.

You talk of history that is of ten or twenty-five years, or perhaps a hundred years. I talk of eternity. And our history is a mere dot in this expanse of eternity. On the contrary, history bears in it the embryo of eternity.

O my dear fellow citizens of this country! Have you ever heard of the clash between History and Scriptures? And the multiplicity of beliefs and contradictions embodied in these two streams of thought embody? Have you heard how these contradictions reconcile with each other? The first condition of this reconciliation is adherence to the Scriptural dictates. Have you ever noticed the incongruity between the Scriptural norms and the codes of history? History is dialectical, historical codes do not support the principle of the Supreme Authority. The Supreme Authority hides within it the power of fatherhood and the munificence of motherhood. This authority is of the Absolute Truth; it is not contained in history. This belongs to the Scriptures.

My dear fellow citizens! Let me tell you that I adore that Authority. My regards and devotion I send out to that Power. And this devotion is of a rebel, a disciplined rebel and not a renegade or a traitor.

Therefore I am writing this note of warning to you – an humble note of warning. Just go through it and see if you can accept the words of this declaratory note. If you cannot,

that will not make me unhappy. Even if it makes me unhappy, that won't be painful. I have learnt not to be aggrieved because of my lessons in discipline and my initiation into a regimented code of conduct.

I have been baptized into this regimentation and have become a nonconformist – a disciplined nonconformist. I am Chanakya, alias Koutilya – the Indian ideologue of statecraft. I am Koutilya of the Gupta era of the second century India, I am the worshipper of astute craftiness, a disciplined dissenter. And this is the declaration of my ideology; an extreme declaratory note. This is an avowal of the primordial reverberation of sound, a note of resonance, the chronicle of the primeval noises of creation – a narrative of eternity.

(1976)



If I'M BORN AGAIN

Would I really take rebirth ? Why to return to *Dharitri,* the Mother–in which shape, which color and for what purpose ? But I have to come back again. It is theosophically predetermined, the last say of philosophy, to return here– to this all enduring earth, to this sinstained earth, forgiving earth. O'*Dharitri,* Can you endure me ? Tell me, can you tolerate ?

If you are divided out of intolerance, that is none of my fault. That was not my intention –I did not intend to scare you. Out of jealousy, you rushed–madly to murder me. Oh ! What a horrible image ! But all your arrows retreated like a boomerang and you're split by that injury. Had I been saint *Durbasa,* I would have cursed you, would have thought of demolishing you. But I am not a *Brahmana* — I am a *Baisya* by *Barna*. *Vaniya* by *Jati.* I am fond of creating, not destroying. For creation, If I have to destroy something, I have no choice. But believe me,

O'*Dharitri*, I am not a brahmana. I am a Baisya, by tradition. I am aspiring to be a *Kshatriya*. It is my intense desire. All wishes are not fulfilled, will not be fulfilled.

Then, why should I take a rebirth ? May or may not, but I am not to be responsible – for the SPLIT, Oh all enduring *Dharitri*. You are torn, out of your own sins.

I was not only a *baniya*, I was the inheritor of the Jaina tradition, its upholder, communicator and also its supporter. Even if you tried to slay me, I was keeping mumb. I could see, there was no link between your ends and means. I cautioned you for that, again and again. But with your *kshatriya* pride, you disregarded this, even denied a piece of land without war.

Now that you realise your mistakes, you are begging time. Though a *baniya* by birth, I sometime observe *brahmana* duties. I have been giving away without the hope of getting back. So how shall I harass you ?

Your empire is collapsing from all sides, that's why you are coming to terms with me. *It is not practicable*. No, this could not have been materialised, had I wished to die a *baniya*. Now that I am aspiring to be a *kshatriya*. I am to embrace all *kshatriya* traits. For that reason only, I've given you some time, and I may support you with my army according to *kshatriya* Customs–as you are a beggar today. But days were, when you were an empress. I have some sympathy for you but– the war between a *kshatriya* and a

kshatriya cannot be ruled out. You are given time and I am prepared to allow you more time. But the possibility of a war can not be evaded.

So if I'm born again, it is not to confront you, but for those forty million people, my kinsmen. This earth is dear to me, still dearer the forty million people. If I'am born again, it is only for them. Can you bear it. Oh all enduring *Dharitri* !

So, can you bear my rebirth, can you ? I am asking you this last question. Can you endure my last desire ? When this desire ends, sorrow vanishes. If I'm born again, I intend to end this desire and so also the sorrow. This is not my desire alone–it is the sorrow, the desire of those of my forty million kinsmen. I am only a symbol, a representative. Thus I have to take the lead. None, can stand a bar not even you–you are a pauper now.

If I'm to be born again, I would have forgiven you, would transmute your jealousy to love and affection, Whether you like it or not, I will be born again in a *Kshatriya* family, no longer a *Baniya.*

Yes ! can you tolerate my rebirth ? Whether you tolerate or not, I will be born a *Kshatriya.* Oh *Dharitri* !– that is my intense desire.

O'Mother Earth ! can you get yourself ready ! If I am to take a rebirth, it must be with the *kshatriya* spirit alone.

(Translated by Nikunja Jena)

Lipipuspa Nayak (b.1965) is a translator and critic known in India. Educated in Utkal University, Bhubaneswar and Central Institute of Englsih and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad, she has six publications, including a 16th century Oriya verse work *Laxmi Purana*, and an 18th century Oriya fiction, *Four Tales of Amusement* (considered to be the first work of fiction in Oriya language) and a few modern Oriya classics. She works in the area of Comparative Indian Literatures. She is also associated with filmmaking and has two films to her credit. She has reviewed over a few hundred books for *The Indian Express* and The *Pioneer* and the *Indian Literature*. She contributes articles to journals of Universities in India. Lipipuspa Nayak has been awarded the Junior Culture Fellowship of Govt. of India (2003-5)



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a rebel speaks... appears to be as fascinating as its author

-Hermann Kulke



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